

Board of Trustees of the Cambridge Public Library

ANNUAL STRATEGIC REVIEW

*Notes from the 11/17/03 Meeting
Facilitated by Steven E. Miller*

PROCESS: Trustees wrote down the three things they felt were the most critical issues facing the library. A combined list was compiled and then everyone reviewed a similar list that had been prepared the year before. Throughout the discussion, suggestions were made about possible Trustee actions.

Key to the discussion was a general feeling that after years of putting their energy into getting the new building approved, the staff and Trustees are now able to focus on a more positive agenda. "There has been a shift in community sentiment. People generally believe that the library is going to happen. We're now getting to the point that we actually do much of the stuff we've been talking about for so long."

Finally, Trustees acknowledged that while ideas are important it all means nothing if not implemented. Therefore, at each future meeting some time will be used for following up the agreed upon Action Items.

FOUR CRITICAL ISSUES

I) Raising Money

This is a long-term issue that Trustees will need to work on. One part of the task is participating in the political process to ensure that the city continues to provide needed levels of support. But an even more central responsibility of the Trustees is to raise private money.

ACTION: no specific actions were discussed for this issue.

II) "Get it right" concerning the New Building

This, also, has two components. First, there is the need to keep ensuring that all aspects of the building process continue on track. This includes securing funding (a key milestone will be the upcoming approval of bonding authority by the City Council), creating a great design for the building and for the entire campus, picking the right furniture, and successfully picking and utilizing the right temporary location. There was a general, if somewhat wary, feeling that all this is currently proceeding down the right path, although Trustees felt that some phone calls to friendly political leaders will be appropriate around the time that the bond is brought to a vote.

A second component is generating public knowledge of and support for the construction process, making sure that library users feel that the end result of a new library with expanded programming is worth the inconvenience, the wait, and the money.

Susan has talked to about 150 people and attended about 10 community meetings over the past several months. The staff also did a CCTV show, which was frequently re-run.

ACTION:

- Every 3 or 4 months, write a “new library progress report” and give it out to everyone who checks out material from the Main library or any of the Branches.
- Initiate a Public Forum Series about library-related issues. Each of the forums could be taped for CCTV and rebroadcast:
 - Green Building Design (Bill will take the lead)
 - Successful Models of Childrens’ and Young Adults’ Spaces & Programming (perhaps drawing on Phoenix and San Antonio)
 - Libraries and Public Art
 - Innovative Library Designs & Programs
 (“So we can learn from the best ideas that other people are doing.”)
 (“We need to model ourselves on others’ success.”)

III) Maintaining High Quality Operations, Positive Staff Morale, & Great Customer Service During the Transition

Trustees felt it was vital to make sure that library users feel that the temporary dislocation brings advantages as well as annoyances, and that vocal customer demand for library services remains strong. Key to making sure that the library continues to work well during the transition is maintaining staff morale, making staff feel acknowledged and appreciated, and making sure that the library continues to be a “great place to work.” For example, Susan said that they’ve created a “fun committee” to generate ideas such as having a gathering to show the film “Party Girl” about a librarian.

ACTION:

- Trustees will try to attend a couple staff events: Annual Party in January, Literacy Program Pot Luck on 12/16.
- Trustees will try to send “quick notes” congratulating staff when appropriate.
- Each Trustee will write a very short (under 100 words) piece for the monthly internal newsletter about a positive library experience or impression.

IV) Act as a source of education and a catalyst for community building to strengthen freedom and protect privacy.

The Library has already played a public role through its opposition to the Patriot Act. There was a feeling that the level of activity has to be increased and the theme has to be broadened to be about the need to encourage civic engagement and fortify civil society.

ACTION:

- Use the Peter Galbraith talk to kick off a series around this theme. As with the Library visions series, work with CCTV to film and broadcast these events.
- Create booklists and lobby displays about related issues.
- Go through the voting lists (?) to generate a list of writers, editors, and people in publishing to use them as resources.